

# **Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization**



A CONSORTIUM PROJECT OF: Augsburg College; College of St. Catherine; Hamline University; Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs; Macalester College; Metropolitan State University; Minneapolis Community College; Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program; University of Minnesota (Center for Urban and Regional Affairs; Children, Youth and Family Consortium; Minnesota Extension Service); University of St. Thomas; and Minneapolis community and neighborhood representatives.

## **CURA RESOURCE COLLECTION**

**Center for Urban and Regional Affairs  
University of Minnesota  
330 Humphrey Center**

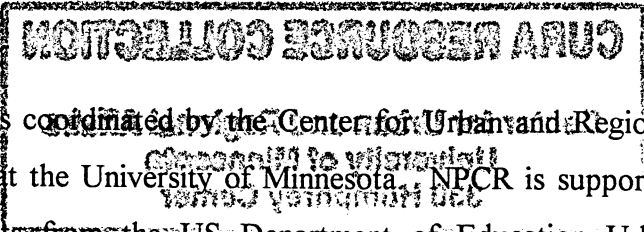
# **Planning for the Future of the Summit-University Neighborhood**

**Prepared by  
Timothy Thoreen  
For the Summit-University Planning Council  
June 1998**

*This report [NPCR 1095] is also available at the following internet  
address: <http://freenet.msp.mn.us/org/npcr>*

June 1998

Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization (NPCR) supported the work of the author of this report but has not reviewed it for publication. The content is solely the responsibility of the author and is not necessarily endorsed by NPCR.

  
NPCR is coordinated by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Minnesota. NPCR is supported by grants from the US Department of Education Urban Community Service Program, The McKnight Foundation and The Minneapolis Foundation. St. Paul projects are funded in part by St. Paul Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), The St. Paul Foundation, and St. Paul Companies.

NPCR

330 Hubert H. Humphrey Center  
301 - 19th Avenue South  
Minneapolis, MN 55455

phone: 612/625-1020

e-mail: [npcr@freenet.msp.mn.us](mailto:npcr@freenet.msp.mn.us)

website: <http://freenet.msp.mn.us/org/npcr>

## **Executive Summary**

The Summit-University Planning Council is currently operating under a comprehensive plan that was adopted nearly twenty years ago. This report attempts to stress the importance of planning for a community and outlines some of the issues the Summit-University Planning Council needs to consider when planning. Three basic principles of planning (collaboration, observation, and vision) are defined and examples of other communities' planning efforts are described.

## **Introduction**

For the last two decades, the Summit-University Planning Council (SUPC) has operated under the guidelines set forth by the comprehensive plan adopted in 1978. While there are still several broad objectives set forth within that document that pertain to everyday life in 1998, it should be fairly obvious that the time has come to revise the plan. The Summit-University Neighborhood is currently experiencing a period of growth and change, especially along Selby Avenue. Without a common vision to help guide that growth, the end result may not be the vibrant, safe and sustainable community that Summit-University is capable of becoming.

### **Why should we plan?**

Planning is one method that can be used to obtain participation from all aspects of a community (residents, businesses, organizations, etc.). That participation hopefully results in the definition and achievement of a desired future state for the neighborhood.

Bill Morrish has written that the process of planning can lead a community to develop:

- a common understanding of the neighborhood's defining features,
- a vision for the future,
- a clear set of policies, plans, and actions for shaping growth and enhancing the area's physical fabric, and

- specific strategies to secure support for projects that will improve the community.

Proactive planning is the surest way to ensure these objectives are attained. As opposed to reactive planning, where response is made to change as it occurs, proactive planning anticipates change and continually builds on available resources. This form of planning requires that residents gather and organize information that outlines needs, supports opportunities, and identifies a range of options (Morrish & Brown, 1994). Obviously a large initial investment of time and energy is necessary for this to happen. However, once in place, a proactive plan should prevent problems that would absorb far greater amounts of resources.

### **The Planning Process**

In the words of Eric Stoller, a planner is like a taxicab driver. The vital questions are: Where are we? Where are we going? and How do we get there? Implied by those questions is a typical process with general attributes that everyone recognizes as essential to planning. Regardless of the scope of the plan, be it state, city, or neighborhood, chances are those attributes are part of the process. Just what are those attributes?

First and foremost, the key word in every one of those questions asked by the taxi driver is "we". No plan will ever get off the ground without community *collaboration*. If a plan is to truly become effective it should reflect the common concerns of the community. Obviously, it is optimistic to expect every single resident within the community to participate in the planning process. However, participatory groups of 50 to 200 residents are not uncommon in Twin Cities' neighborhood planning events. With a citizen base of that sort and the input of several organizations within a neighborhood, the foundation for a good plan is set.

Secondly, citizens need to understand the current state of the community. Data collection is essential to this goal. *Recognition and observation* of the community and trends found within and around it allows all planning participants to knowledgeably engage in the process. Planners also acknowledge the need to continue observation well after the plan has been completed. In doing so, you can determine the effectiveness the plan has had in reaching the goals of the community.

The last element typical to any planning process is a sense of direction, or a *vision*. This vision has come in various forms, depending on the preferences of the community. Some communities tend to take a more utilitarian approach to their vision, asking, "what is it that we need?" Others will be much more grandiose in their direction, making general statements about values the plan must reflect. Wherever in that range a community's vision falls is unimportant. What matters is that the community now has a mission that can guide it in not only the planning process, but also in the community development activities that stem from the new plan.

### **The Summit-University Neighborhood Situation**

The SUPC does have power to determine the extent of those three planning elements. Before starting the entire planning process, the SUPC needs to decide to what extent it wants to take its plan. Should the plan be focused only on the planning council's needs? Or should the plan be more inclusive, attempting to coordinate the activities of all community participants?

The answers to those questions will determine how the three planning principles fit into the current Summit-University situation. If a broader, more community-based plan is anticipated, several programs, institutions, and projects are already intact that

could smooth the effort to create that type of plan. Other projects have been proposed that would greatly aid the process. An SUPC-centered organizational plan would most likely have fewer considerations, but nonetheless similar.

### ***Opportunities and Weaknesses in Working toward a New Plan***

As mentioned above, collaboration is the key toward developing a new plan. The foundation for that collaboration has begun to form in the Summit-University Neighborhood. Monthly networking breakfasts attended by various community leaders are friendly, informal meetings that inform people of new events in the neighborhood. Broad ranges of interests are represented at these meetings, ranging from City Council member Jerry Blakey and Planning and Economic Development (PED) staff members to gardening enthusiasts and prospective business owners.

The large number of interest groups involved with the SU community is an important reason for the success of the networking breakfasts. Groups such as the Selby Area Community Development Corporation (SACDC), the Selby Area Business Association (SABA, formerly CHBPA) and University United are key elements of the neighborhood. The SUPC can try to involve those groups through projects or a simple continuation of the networking breakfasts. Regardless, these interests must be considered when creating a new plan for the Summit-University Neighborhood.

The City of St. Paul is about to take a closer look at the needs of the Summit-University Neighborhood as well. By the end of 1998, the City of St. Paul PED will have commenced a project to examine the emergent issues in the Summit-University neighborhood and methods they can use to achieve some short-term goals for that area. The SUPC has an opportunity to be proactive in this regard by showing a community-

supported effort toward creating a new district plan. Such an effort would aid the collaborative endeavor between SUPC and the St. Paul PED for a new plan and provide material for compromise and discussion.

A large number of plans that affect the Summit-University neighborhood or adjacent neighborhoods are already in place. From the Selby Avenue Small Area Plan to the Saint Paul Land Use Plan, many common threads can be identified and used to form the backbone to SUPC's planning efforts. (See other document for main themes in other plans)

The underlying cause behind much of the interest in the Summit-University Neighborhood has been the recent surge of growth along Selby Avenue. This positively affects the planning process, as people want to ensure that the end result of all this growth is something highly livable and sustainable. The downside to such rapid growth is the need to implement a plan in a similarly rapid fashion. This shortened time scale highlights some of the weaknesses that need to be addressed before an effective plan will be completed.

The SUPC appears to be lacking a true mission in its day-to-day activities. The decision-making process used at the SUPC has not been one of reflectance on the overall mission of the planning council. As one of the three elements of planning, a vision is necessary for effective planning. When a motion is made, council members should reflect not only on the merits of the motion, but also on its relevance to the council's objectives.

That sense of mission can also be used to guide the inner-workings of the board. From all appearances, board relations within the Summit-University Planning Council



have been poor at best. A simplified mission that provides a common denominator to everyone's agenda would be a good step toward improving relations on the board.

Another move to ensure consistency in the operations of the SUPC would be to smooth the transition created when new members are added to the board. A mentoring program or even a day-long retreat that enables the new members to familiarize themselves to the issues facing the board would help toward that end.

Another of the three key elements to planning is collaboration. While a large number of organizations with an interest in the Summit-University Neighborhood exist, few opportunities are available for them to learn what each does. Outside of the networking breakfasts, no formal structure is available that facilitates communication between the groups and attempts to avoid "doubling-up" of efforts. Instead of fighting for the same grants, loans, funds, etc., these groups could be sharing, and likely maximizing the usefulness of those resources.

As mentioned before, the Summit-University Neighborhood has a lot going for it in terms of community and city interest and involvement. Recognition and treatment of the weaknesses listed above will help to use that interest to its fullest. Whether the SUPC wishes to use the programs described in this document is entirely the council's decision. Those programs offer examples of ways to implement the three primary elements of planning (collaboration, observation, and vision) detailed earlier in this paper.

Once those three elements are in place, a solid foundation will be set for the creation of a new Summit-University (District 8) Plan. The following examples of other planning processes (both theoretical and applied) show how other communities have formed their community plans.

## **Examples of Community Plan Processes**

Bill Morrish and Catherine Brown, in a book titled "Planning to Stay" lay out a theoretical six-step planning process that neighborhoods can use to create a plan. The steps go as follows:

- Step 1: Organizing – Can we agree to meet and work together for a common purpose?
- Step 2: Gathering – What kind of neighborhood do we have?
- Step 3: Ordering – What kind of neighborhood do we want?
- Step 4: Making – What kind of neighborhood can we make?
- Step 5: Taking Action – How do we put the plan to work in our neighborhood?
- Step 6: Sustaining – What do we need to sustain our neighborhood?

Morrish and Brown provide some suggestions for each of those steps and describe what types of products should result from each step. They also stress that those steps are not separate events "with clear beginnings and endings." Rather, the authors view the steps and the whole process as an ongoing, with steps continually overlapping each other. As a final recommendation, Morrish and Brown emphasize that the process needs to be viewed as building the community instead of making a plan. With that type of mindset, the final product is much more likely to be a living document used on a daily basis, not a report that collects dust on a shelf.

St. Paul's West Side has attempted to create that sort of living document with the recent completion of its new Community Plan. The whole process started in 1992 when some residents felt that the 1988 plan was not going to be sufficient for the near future. In 1996, a long-range planning committee was formed to design and facilitate a community-wide planning process. Finally in 1997, the planning venture went full-steam ahead when over a six month period, more than 200 community members participated in a series of small "neighborhood dialogues" and one large neighborhood "summit". The 1997 Community Plan represents the compilation of the information gathered at those

sessions and is organized into three interconnected areas: Values, Vision, and Actions. Within the Action portion of the Plan, strategies are listed out along with responsible stakeholders and a timeline for achievement of the strategy.

The Thomas-Dale Small Area Plan appears to be much more extensive in terms of topics covered versus the West Side Community Plan. However, the extensive nature of that plan comes at a cost. Each individual goal becomes diminished, or blurred, by all of the others included in the plan. The West Side plan is much easier to understand and appears to consider the implications each element of the plan has for the entire community. That cohesiveness is not apparent in the Thomas-Dale plan. While it still contains a strategy-based approach, it does not seem to be very user-friendly for the average concerned citizen.

The Hamline Midway Community has taken a more long-term approach to creating its new Community Plan and tries to find new ways of incorporating all of the community's voices. A one-year process started with ten "discussion groups", smaller groups of participants meant to brainstorm ideas, based on different subjects such as "strengths", "challenges", and "vision". The results of those discussion groups were then presented in a larger town meeting and used to inform the development of their plan. Eric Stoller mentioned that it is important to consider using both small group and large group meetings in the planning process due to the fact that people vary in what type of setting they feel most comfortable communicating their feelings.

Another example of community planning comes from the West Farms neighborhood in the Bronx, New York. There, they call their plan a "quality-of-life" plan based on the notion that, "children and families, as well as businesses, grow best in *whole*

*communities*- not in housing developments, where only bricks and mortar are planned and paid for.” The neighborhood convened a task force including resident leaders, service providers (teachers and police), local merchants, and a designated leader (in this case the CDC provided leadership). Regular neighborhood forums were convened to generate participation from local residents, community board members, and city agency officials. The planning process was viewed as a tool for community building and the end result was a five-year action plan for neighborhood enhancement.

The Phillips neighborhood of Minneapolis developed a flowchart describing their planning process. Taken from a 1978 planning document, the chart may be two decades old, but the principles of it and the process described in it remains applicable to today’s plans for the next century. As can be seen in the diagram (in back), the principles of collaboration and recognition form the first two stages of the process used by the Phillips neighborhood. The process as described in this diagram, while comprehensive, may be more time consuming than the SUPC would wish for its own planning process. Merriam Park, in St. Paul, offers a faster approach to planning.

Merriam Park has embarked its planning process with the hope of finishing a new community plan within six months. Advertisements were ran twice in the monthly newsletter, the Merriam Post notifying community residents of the imminent meetings for community input into the new plan. Three community meetings are to be held, each meeting with a different focus (Physical, Social, and Economic Development). At each meeting the participants are divided into 6 subgroups. Each subgroup develops a list of their concerns and hopes (in relation to that night’s meeting topic) for Merriam Park. Once a plan is compiled, citizens will have a certain period of time in which comments

will be welcomed and considered for revision. When the whole process is over, a special event is planned for the community to celebrate the participation of residents in the planning process.

### **Conclusion**

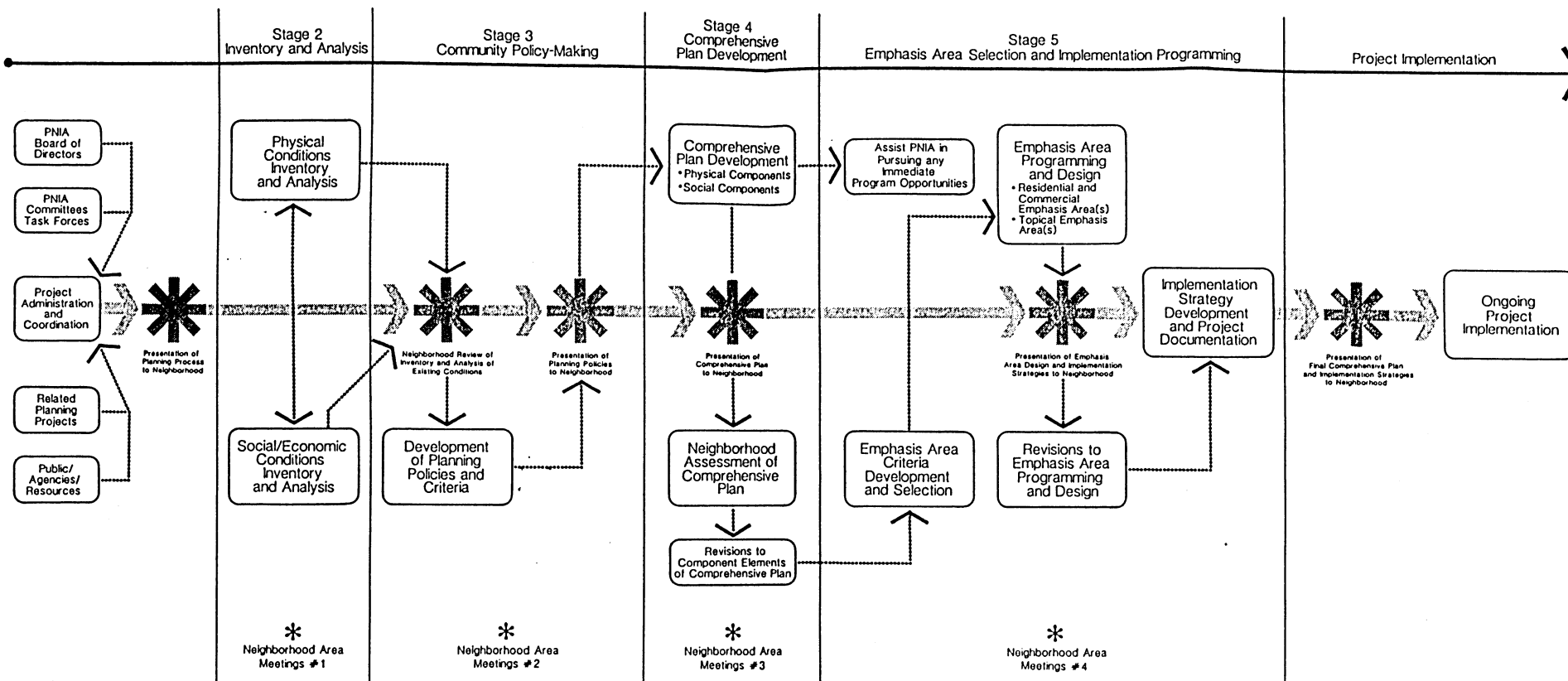
With the help of these examples and reference to the three elements of planning, the Summit-University Planning Council should be able to form a new comprehensive plan that will be both innovative and adopted in the every day practices of the neighborhood. To meet that end, the plan needs to be supported by a community that has acted cooperatively with a single vision in mind. A strategy-based plan with rough timelines set for the achievement of goals (an action plan) similar to that of the West Side's Community Plan will provide plenty of opportunities for the community to participate in and monitor the effectiveness of the SUPC's new plan. The new plan will not only be used, but will most likely be updated much more regularly than once every twenty years. The end result will be responsive community that is aware of its needs and is willing to work for them.

### **Literature Cited**

Morrish, William R., and Brown C.R. 1994. Planning to Stay: learning to see the Physical features of your neighborhood. Milkweed Editions. Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Stoller, Eric. Hamline Midway Coalition. Personal Interview. March 1998.

# Planning Process



# Planning Process

